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Chairman: Mr. Galuška ..... (Czech Republic)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 112: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*) (A/54/98, A/54/411, A/54/419 and A/54/430)

1. **Mr. Jong Myong Hak** (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that to protect and promote the rights of children was to bring up children as independent social beings with sound bodies, a moral sense and intellectual faculties. Individual States must arouse social interest in the protection of children, with a view to enhancing their right to life and to providing them with education and health care. As the most vulnerable members of society, they were entitled to receive preferential treatment. How they were protected and educated would have a decisive influence on the destiny of the planet.

2. The Government had been making unsparing investments in that regard, including paying the full cost of nurseries and kindergartens and providing free medical care and free education. It was also especially important to strengthen the family as the basic cell of society.

3. The role of international organizations in assisting States in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child must be enhanced. Developing countries, which lacked resources, were unable to increase their protection of children. In that regard, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea appreciated the efforts of UNICEF to implement national action programmes for the protection and promotion of the rights of children.

4. Violence against children — including child labour and traffic in children, child prostitution and child pornography — was a serious threat to children's rights. The international community must take measures to redress those problems. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea supported efforts to finalize, before the tenth anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention, the draft optional protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the draft optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts. His delegation suggested that time should be set aside during the current session for the resolution of obstacles to the implementation of the Convention.

5. **Mr. Mutaboba** (Rwanda) said that, although many Governments had ratified the Convention, the rights of children continued to be violated throughout the world. The recent genocide in Rwanda had claimed over a million lives — a gross violation of the right to life — and had had a tragic effect on the lives of Rwandan children. Children believed to be Tutsis had been cruelly killed alongside their parents. Girls had been raped and held as sexual hostages; as a result many had given birth, while others had contracted sexually transmitted diseases. Since Rwanda had a culture of silence, however, many young girls had hesitated to bring charges, despite the fact that rape was a crime under the genocide law. Both adults and children had killed and raped, which explained why minors in Rwanda were being brought to justice for their participation in genocide.

6. The genocide had destroyed the social fabric. As a result of those events and of the repatriation in 1996 and 1997, 87,000 children had become heads of families. The number of orphans and unaccompanied minors had been estimated at between 300,000 and 400,000. Despite the Government's best efforts, their welfare remained uncertain. It had launched a programme to provide free education and vocational training to such children; many, however, were still too traumatized to speak. Trauma counselling services encouraged children to go to school, in the belief that schools helped to heal both students and teachers. Unfortunately, funds were lacking to implement a holistic approach to resolving educational and socio-economic needs.

7. In compliance with the Convention, children below the age of 18 who had been suspected of committing genocide were entrusted to rehabilitation centres, with a view to developing their understanding of the seriousness of their crimes, and to improving their skills. The Government of Rwanda requested the international community to assist it in rehabilitating those children, who represented the future of the country. The Government allocated 5 per cent of its budget to assisting survivors of genocide, particularly children, who were provided with modest shelter and other basic necessities. Studies had been undertaken of the phenomenon of street children; some of them were orphans and unaccompanied minors, while others were sent out by their parents to beg. Government efforts to provide special rehabilitation centres for such children had had little effect. In the view of Rwanda, eliminating poverty was the only solution.

8. Prostitution, a related problem, was practised by young girls from poor families, female heads of families, and orphans. Adults, especially male adults, should be held responsible for that crime. Although the Penal Code provided for terms of imprisonment for persons convicted of prostitution, the law was not enforced, largely owing to the culture of silence.

9. The Ministry of Education was endeavouring to consider the needs of disabled children, but infrastructure

and equipment were expensive. Child soldiers were first rehabilitated in special schools and then reintegrated into communities and given free education. The Ministry of Social Affairs had set up guidelines to ensure that treatment provided for such children complied with international human-rights standards. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child had been translated into the local language and would soon be incorporated into school curricula. Information on the Charter and on children's rights was being disseminated with the assistance of non-governmental organizations and UNICEF. Moreover, the Government was working to sensitize both parents and the private sector about the need to invest in education.

10. The Ministry of Education was endeavouring to integrate a gender perspective into curricula and to redress the problem of gender-based discrimination in education. In addition, the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission was designing a programme to inculcate the values of tolerance, peace, reconciliation and respect for human rights in the Rwandan population. They had requested all ministries to incorporate those moral values into their programmes, for the benefit of children.

11. The Government was encouraging all Rwandans to become involved in children's matters, and children's funds had been started in most communities to meet the basic needs of poor and orphan children. Resources were badly needed. One third of Rwanda's national income was devoted to debt servicing; the Rwandan people needed greater assistance from the international community to achieve a better world for future generations.

12. **Ms. Assegid** (Ethiopia) said that the special session of the General Assembly to be held in 2001 should provide the forum in which the international community could reaffirm its commitment to children. A broad range of children's rights were laid down in the Ethiopian Constitution. In Ethiopia, children under 18 years of age were not recruited into the armed forces. In addition, Ethiopian law was fully compatible with article 32 of the Convention, on children's work. The law prohibited the employment of children under 14 years of age, and provided that those between 14 and 18 could work only under strict conditions. In Ethiopia, children's work within the family was not seen as exploitative or detrimental to growth and development but rather as imparting basic family skills and responsibilities.

13. The current social-welfare policy gave top priority to children and provided for community-based approaches and the participation of the whole of society in the implementation of welfare programmes. The health policy currently being implemented emphasized the health needs of families, and especially women and children; major priority areas were reproductive health care, child immunization, infectious-disease treatment, and the control of epidemics and sexually transmitted diseases. Furthermore, the new education policy provided free primary-school education and aimed to raise the attendance rate, especially for girls. The primary-school enrolment rate for girls had significantly improved. In accordance with article 29 of the Convention, primary education was provided in the various native languages.

14. Several studies had been carried out by the Government and by non-governmental organizations to assess what measures would be needed to avert severe social problems faced by children, including studies of street children and dislocated families and of harmful traditional practices. The Government was doing its utmost to change the social situation in the country; as with other African countries, the goals of the World Summit for Children and the World Summit for Social Development were far from being realized, largely owing to a lack of resources. It therefore requested the international community to abide by its commitment to strengthen technical and financial assistance, especially to the least developed countries, of which Ethiopia was one.

15. **Ms. Ibrahimova** (Azerbaijan) said that improving the situation and rights of children was a priority for her Government. Children's rights were enshrined in the Constitution and laws on labour, employment and marriage and the family, and in the Criminal and Civil Codes. Azerbaijan was a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its Child Protection Act was fully consistent with that instrument. However, Azerbaijan's difficulties as a State in transition meant that many social goals, including goals relating to children, had yet to be met.

16. Her delegation fully supported Security Council resolution 1261 (1999) as an important instrument for protecting the interests of children affected by armed conflicts. Children suffered worst in such conflicts, as Azerbaijanis knew: as a result of the armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, 20 per cent of Azerbaijan's territory had been occupied and the country was now host to a million refugees and displaced persons, most of them women and children. They were living in makeshift accommodation, in abject conditions. They needed a peaceful resolution of the conflict and the chance to return to their homes. Meanwhile, their physical survival and the preservation of their faith in a better future depended on humanitarian assistance. In that respect, her delegation was deeply grateful for the help provided by the United Nations

system and a variety of international and non-governmental organizations. Particular thanks were due to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and its Executive Director for their programmes in the spheres of child health, including immunization and nutrition, and school attendance.

17. As children were the future, it was inevitable to ask what children's well-being entailed on the eve of a new millennium. For Azerbaijan there was only one answer: an end to war, the promotion of good-neighbourly relations and the strengthening of the economy, public health and education.

18. **Ms. Al-Moosa** (Oman) said that women and children were the main victims of the growing gulf between peoples created by globalization and the debt burden. Oman had acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1996, and shortly thereafter had established the National Council for the Protection of Children, which was responsible for implementing the policies formulated pursuant to the Convention. The report submitted by her country to the Committee on the Rights of the Child earlier in 1999 had made it clear that Oman was honouring all its relevant undertakings. That had also been acknowledged in the UNICEF *State of the World's Children* report.

19. The Government had been particularly active in providing basic health-care services and had dramatically reduced child-mortality rates. Increased levels of education and health awareness and a range of social-development programmes had also played a part in bringing about that reduction. Her country remained determined to continue to build on that success and overcome the challenges it faced. Children were and always would be at the heart of the comprehensive development policy aimed at raising standards of living in Oman, and achieving sustainable development.

20. **Ms. Russell** (Barbados), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that despite international efforts to recognize the rights of children, there was no guarantee that children would be born into a favourable environment: half the world's poor were children. Long before the 1990 World Conference on Education for All, CARICOM countries had placed important emphasis on education. An organization known as Service Volunteer for All (SERVOL), headquartered in Trinidad, had developed a special approach to early childhood education, which had been used as a model throughout the Caribbean, with funds for training and materials provided by UNICEF.

21. More recently, all CARICOM Governments had determined that education was a top priority for development and progress: several provided free education at all levels and several spent large portions of their budgets on education. That interest in education had led to the creation of the Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) programme, a regional life-skills programme designed to foster well-being and a healthy social and family life. Coordinated by the UNICEF Caribbean Area Office in Barbados and partly funded by UNICEF, the programme targeted vulnerable social groups, especially youth. HFLE was conducting a Caribbean-wide survey on adolescent health, knowledge, perceptions and practices, and reports on the first group of countries surveyed — Jamaica, Dominica, Antigua and Grenada — had already been disseminated. The results of surveys in other Caribbean countries would also soon be published.

22. The Caribbean Community was pleased to note that the *State of the World's Children* had indicated that the region enjoyed a higher school-enrolment rate than any other in the developing world, at all educational levels, and that girls participated as much as or more than boys. All the Caribbean countries had signed and ratified the Convention, and had instituted mechanisms to monitor its implementation. Throughout the region, child-care boards had traditionally monitored the welfare of children. But recently other organizations had joined in that effort. A confidential children's hotline had been set up in Jamaica that encouraged children to call for counselling, information or conversation; in Barbados a non-governmental organization known as PAREDOS served as a watchdog for children's rights. Child-abuse workshops had been held throughout the region.

23. HIV/AIDS remained a threat to children throughout the world, with ravaging effects that were difficult to measure. The high percentage of AIDS among teenage girls, including in the Caribbean, highlighted the importance of education: a review conducted by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) had found that education helped to prevent sexual transmission in adolescents.

24. CARICOM applauded the International Labour Organization (ILO) for its worldwide campaign to promote the new Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 1999 (No. 182), and welcomed the global programme undertaken by UNICEF, ILO and the World Bank to provide second-chance education to groups at risk.

25. It was dismayed by the harmful effects of armed conflict on children and supported efforts to combat the problem of child soldiers, including the drafting of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the

Child that would raise to 18 the minimum age for recruitment into the armed forces. CARICOM welcomed efforts to revive awareness of the problem of the availability of small arms, which had complicated the drug trade in the Caribbean, with devastating consequences.

26. The CARICOM States were deeply concerned about the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and had been alarmed to learn, from the seminar on sexual violence and exploitation of children in Latin America and the Caribbean held at Montevideo in March 1999, that thousands of children in the region had been victims of diverse forms of sexual exploitation. The declaration that had emerged from that forum recognized the need for public information campaigns and the integration of sex-education programmes into the social system. Awareness programmes of that kind had already been developed in some of the CARICOM countries in connection with AIDS-prevention efforts.

27. CARICOM countries remained concerned about the survival of children; while the advocacy of children's rights was a worthy task, the challenge was to put words into action.

28. **Ms. Kapalata** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention was shadowed by frustration for most countries of the developing world. Tanzania's two gravest setbacks in implementing the goals of the World Summit for Children had been poverty and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which had undermined any modest gains that might have been registered. Exacerbated by the excruciatingly heavy external debt, poverty had affected social services, most of which focused on children. Tanzania's national programme for action to implement the goals of the Summit had included reducing infant and child mortality and malnutrition, and increasing access to education, health services, shelter and potable water. Progress over the past 10 years had been much slower than hoped.

29. The HIV/AIDS pandemic had threatened the survival of many children and orphaned many more. The fact that more than 11 million Africans, a quarter of them children, had died of AIDS should spur the international community to action. In that regard, her Government commended UNICEF on its proposed project for the prevention of mother-to-child HIV/AIDS transmission in Tanzania. The protection and promotion of the rights of children in the country were directly linked to the resolution of those two basic problems.

30. It was unacceptable that children should still be used as targets and instruments of war; in that regard, the United Republic of Tanzania supported the recommendation of the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict to make the protection of children a central concern in post-conflict programmes. It agreed, above all, that conflicts should be prevented before they occurred, or resolved before they assumed destructive proportions; and urged scrupulous adherence to Security Council resolution 1261 (1999), which called for special measures to protect children in situations of armed conflict. In addition, her delegation urged unqualified support for the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and hoped he would be given the requisite resources to fulfill his mandate.

31. The new millennium should be met with new commitments and strategies, and an understanding of the importance of partnership and international cooperation in protecting women and children and implementing the goals of the Convention.

32. **Ms. Farhadi** (Afghanistan) observed that, despite the near-universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children's rights, particularly their right to grow up in peace and happiness, were systematically violated in many parts of the world. In developing countries, especially, children lived in intolerable conditions. Cooperation between Governments, international agencies, the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations in promoting and protecting children's rights was imperative.

33. As a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Afghanistan reaffirmed the central place of the family in society. Children must be brought up in the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations, a spirit of peace, tolerance and equality, not the spirit of fundamentalism and intolerance upheld in Afghanistan, with foreign support, by the Taliban.

34. The international community knew that Afghanistan was the victim of an undeclared war fomented by its southern neighbour in an attempt to install a puppet regime. In that war, children, whether as combatants or non-combatants, suffered physical and mental trauma. Only recently, on 20 October, an article in *The Guardian* newspaper in the United Kingdom had reported the plight of child survivors of a summer offensive by the Taliban to the north of Kabul. According to the United Nations Information Centre in Islamabad, young non-Afghan students, some no more than 14 years old, in religious schools in Pakistan were recruited for service in the Taliban forces in Afghanistan. On 22 October, the President of the Security Council had referred, in the fourth paragraph of his

note S/PRST/1999/29, to the Council's deep distress over the Taliban's use of such young people as soldiers.

35. There could be no military outcome to the crisis in the country: the foreign troops and alleged volunteers must leave and there must be negotiations under United Nations auspices for a peaceful settlement. The Taliban, however, refused to negotiate. She appealed to the international community to put pressure on them to forego their expansionist aims and to allow Afghanistan's people and children to exercise their right to live in peace and harmony.

36. **Mr. Yusoff** (Malaysia) said that Malaysia's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its socio-economic policies and plans showed the country's strong interest in children's well-being and the protection of their rights. Malaysia believed that a strong family constituted the most important guarantee of children's welfare and had, in 1991, initiated a family-development programme that provided families with information on matters such as health — including AIDS-related information — parenting skills and the development of the human potential. Naturally, such programmes needed to be backed up by action to address such problems as poverty and unemployment.

37. Malaysia had criminalized the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. The misuse of the Internet for such purposes must be halted forthwith: more Internet service providers must comply with the legislation or strengthen their self-regulatory measures in that respect. Deeply concerned that increasing numbers of children were being trafficked, whether for commercial sex or forced labour, Malaysia called on Member States to augment their cooperation to counter that scourge. It was willing to expand its own activities with other countries and international organizations in that regard and would continue to punish traffickers through both criminal and civil measures.

38. Children were the most vulnerable persons in armed conflicts and their special needs regarding physical and psychological recovery and reintegration into society must be duly considered. There should be better coordination between international organizations in protecting children affected by such conflicts. Priority should be given to tracing families for reunification. All States should refrain from recruiting children under the age of 18 into their armed forces.

39. His delegation agreed with the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography that the justice system, education and the media were the three catalysts for child protection. It also agreed with the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict about the urgent need for an "era of application" to translate international instruments into deeds.

40. **Ms. Arnon** (Israel) said Israeli public opinion had been a major factor for wider official and popular recognition of children's rights in the country. Penalties for sexual offences against minors had been made more severe and there had been judicial recognition of children's rights to human dignity, expression of their own opinions and freedom from use of punishment as an educational measure. In 1997, the Minister of Justice had appointed a Committee on Children and the Law to evaluate Israeli law for consistency with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and with other universal and local principles.

41. Non-governmental organizations pursued a wide range of activities concerning children's rights. The leading such organization was the National Council for the Child: it had prompted adoption by the Knesset of the Declaration of Children's Rights following Israel's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the establishment in 1990 of the office of Ombudsman for Children and Youth. Since April 1998 a Children's Rights Mobile Unit had been touring the country teaching children about their own and others' rights through interactive games and displays. The Council maintained links with UNICEF, the Children's Rights Information Network and other relevant international groups. Another prominent non-governmental organization, the Organization for the Protection of the Child, focused on children at risk within the home. For example, it operated an emergency shelter for children and provided treatment and legal advice in cases of child abuse.

42. Her delegation shared many of the concerns expressed by the Special Rapporteur and the Secretary-General's Special Representative in their reports (A/54/411 and A/54/430 respectively). It was also grateful for the work of UNICEF as reflected in the Executive Director's statements to the Third Committee and the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Israel had put the subject of children on its international-cooperation agenda and could offer to other countries the benefits of its unique programmes in the early childhood domain. In its view, protecting children's rights was not only morally justified but was also an investment in the future.

43. **Mr. Bocalandro** (Argentina) said that his delegation subscribed to the statement made by the representative of Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group. Argentina had incorporated the Convention on the Rights of the Child into its Constitution. The near-universal ratification of the Convention and the United Nations action in the fields of

development, humanitarian aid and peace and international security showed that the international community was firmly resolved to protect children's rights. Actors of fundamental importance, such as UNICEF, continually proposed helpful innovations such as the rights-based approach, and Security Council resolution 1261 (1999) was, as the Special Representative had described it, a major landmark. The Council would henceforth be able to bring all its weight to bear in protecting children in armed conflicts.

44. The legal instruments governing children's participation in armed conflicts needed to be improved. For example, conclusion of the negotiations on the draft optional protocol to make 18 the minimum age of recruitment was urgent. In that respect, his delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's decision to set a minimum age for participation in United Nations forces. His delegation supported the Special Representative's call for an "era of application" for international norms, as well as his other proposals for action. It congratulated the Special Representative as well as UNICEF and the other agencies concerned on their outstanding work. It also wished to pay tribute to the many people from governmental and non-governmental organizations who had given their lives for the cause of children.

45. Throughout most of the world, children's development was hampered by poverty and inadequate access to basic services, especially health and education. The international economic system must find a means of ensuring that the family and schools could play their central role in overcoming children's problems.

46. **Mr. Botnaru** (Republic of Moldova) commended the United Nations on its system-wide efforts to promote and protect children, and expressed support, *inter alia*, for the drafting of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The Republic of Moldova was seeking to protect the vulnerable sectors of society from the impact of economic transition, and had accordingly developed a comprehensive national agenda for the protection of children. In the eastern part of the country, the separatist regime continued, however, to violate the human rights of the population, including the rights of the child. Some 35,000 children in that area had no possibility of being schooled in their mother tongue. Moreover, school-leavers were deprived of the right to obtain higher qualifications, having been taught according to a separatist curriculum which did not meet national education standards. The Government was nonetheless doing its best to improve that situation.

47. Under domestic law, children enjoyed the same rights as adults; a revision of legislation to further enhance children's rights was under way. Special protection was currently accorded to orphans. However, the combined effects of the transition and the international financial crisis had led to an increase in the number of homeless children and children not enrolled in school. With regard to disabled children, his Government was currently seeking funding to develop much-needed education programmes.

48. A number of programmes had already been initiated to improve the health and nutrition of children. The Republic of Moldova continued to rely on international and bilateral support to protect the future of children. It was grateful for the assistance of a number of agencies for socio-economic development and improvement of the conditions of children, including UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

49. **Mr. Sidibe** (Mali) said that Mali was promoting the rights of the child through sectoral programmes to reduce infant and maternal mortality, combat child malnutrition and illiteracy, ensure children's access to basic health services and provide adults with family-planning services.

50. Since Mali's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, and as a result of the new social and political environment in the country, over 1,000 associations and non-governmental organizations had sprung up to help children and families, and the Convention itself had been translated into national languages and disseminated among local communities. Also, in 1997 the Government had set up institutions — including the Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Children and the Family, an inter-ministerial committee and a joint governmental/non-governmental committee — and had established policies and programmes to deal with problems specific to children, families and women. Also, the State was encouraging the establishment of associations to promote income-generating activities for poor families and was preparing to implement an anti-poverty programme.

51. Between 1993 and 1998, Mali had spent some 13 per cent of its budget on essential social services; the objective of the 20/20 initiative put forward at the World Summit for Social Development was therefore far from being achieved. However, the Government hoped that Mali, as a highly indebted poor country, would have its debt burden lightened before the end of 1999, enabling it to allocate more resources to such services.

52. The Government and its partners were combating intolerable forms of child labour, the transboundary

trafficking in children, and female genital mutilation. Over the next few years, social mobilization, education and training would be brought to bear on those problems. A children's parliament had been established to promote children's participation in promoting their rights.

53. A social-protection code and a child-welfare code were soon to come into force, while the Penal Code already protected children against any acts threatening their lives or survival: there were severe penalties for infanticide and child neglect. Other legislation, including the marriage and guardianship codes, was being reviewed to bring it up to date with developments in children's rights. The national plan for children's survival, development and protection should lead to a constant improvement in conditions. The vaccination and nutrition programmes had significantly improved child health. Mali's system for democratic accountability enabled all Malians to question government officials about any human-rights violations. Under that system, specific questions had been asked about non-legal adoptions and trafficking in children.

54. The Government was holding consultations with UNICEF and a number of other agencies and non-governmental organizations on the major issues involved in its policy of education for all. Particular attention was also being paid to child misfits and disabled children. Institutions were being set up for such children, and, with UNICEF support, there were programmes for the prevention of disability and the rehabilitation of disabled children.

55. Despite significant progress since 1990, the political will of States to improve child welfare and achieve the goals of the World Summit was often thwarted by resource shortages caused by the debt burden and the drop in official development assistance. He called attention to the role of solidarity and cooperation which United Nations institutions, non-governmental organizations and the international community should be playing in order to help the developing countries protect the rights of children, particularly in terms of access to education, the key to social development. Under the Convention, children had legitimate claims on society, which Mali supported. Indeed, if children were to be protected, all Conventions on children's and women's rights must be translated into reality.

56. **Mr. Al-Humaimidi** (Iraq) said that, despite the large number of countries that had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, millions of children all over the world were suffering the most extreme deprivation. Children were the primary victims of armed conflict, economic sanctions and economic exploitation. The international community therefore had an obligation to follow up implementation of the relevant international instruments, each of which had affirmed the right of the child to special protection. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict had made commendable efforts to raise awareness of the suffering of children.

57. The Iraqi Government was doing its utmost to make available to children the health, educational and other requirements that would enable them to play a useful role in society. Before the imposition of sanctions, Iraq had had some of the highest nutritional standards in the region and almost universal health care. The collective punishment which those sanctions represented had reduced Iraq from a position of relative prosperity to one of absolute poverty. Children were the foremost victims, as was clear from the horrifying increases in child- and maternal-mortality rates. More than one quarter of all Iraqi children were malnourished and only 40 per cent of the population had access to a safe water supply. Nearly all schools needed extensive reconstruction work. The UNICEF report on the effects of sanctions in Iraq issued in August 1999 had made it clear that the death of more than half a million Iraqi children under the age of five could have been avoided had it not been for the sanctions. The mortality figures showed that an act of genocide was being committed against the children of Iraq.

58. The effect of the sanctions had been exacerbated by the allied forces' use, during their onslaught against Iraq in 1991, of depleted uranium, which has been implicated in the death of 50,000 Iraqi children in the following year from leukaemia and other types of cancer, from which the children of Iraq would continue to suffer for many generations, and was also responsible for a large number of birth defects. It was imperative that the international community should shoulder its responsibilities, lift the sanctions and assist in the decontamination of the environment polluted by depleted uranium.

59. In view of the important role played by the Special Representative in raising awareness amongst the international community of the extent of Iraqi children's suffering, his delegation wished to invite him to visit Iraq in order to get a first-hand impression of the disastrous consequences for children of the sanctions, which were, in effect, a form of genocide.

60. **Mr. Minoves-Triquell** (Andorra) said that all bodies, public and private, in Andorra had always considered the care of children to be a high-priority task, and therefore regretted the sometimes desperate situations which children faced in a so-called "global" world.

61. The situation of children involved in conflicts deserved special attention. The minimum age for recruitment should be 18; indeed, when Andorra had acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it had expressed its disagreement with the age limit of 15. He commended the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for his report (A/54/430), and called on him to continue his work, particularly in finding ways to deal with situations of "imperfect peace". The figures of 2 million children killed and 6 million maimed in conflict situations over the past decade (ibid., para. 10) were a tremendous shock for Andorra, which had seen no war since the thirteenth century.

62. The Government of Andorra was helping to fund the exhibition on children and small arms currently on display at UNICEF Headquarters, which it hoped would be hosted by various countries during 2000 to raise awareness of the harm small arms were causing amongst the young. It also welcomed the fact that the Statute of the International Criminal Court referred to crimes against children as being particularly odious.

63. The United Nations must play a role in curbing the sale of children and their sexual exploitation. The report of the Special Rapporteur (A/54/411) showed that countries must be more active in combating that painful reality, which was often the result of the bad economic situation in many countries. He called for better coordination on the matter between United Nations bodies, followed by action plans with appropriate human and material resources.

64. He noted that UNICEF — which deserved full support from all countries in its task of protecting children — took the view that without an education for development that prepared people to respect human rights, there could be little progress. In that connection, the UNICEF Committee in Andorra had sent out various texts on human rights to Andorran children and young people, pursuant to article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

65. It was regrettable that the question of child labour was still a subject of debate in the Committee, and he wondered what kind of future it would be in which the prospects for young people were so different depending on where they came from. That being the case, the Government of Andorra welcomed the recently adopted ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention.

66. He expressed the hope that the good words and wishes which all delegations had expressed in the Committee would become a reality in the new century and that the contradictions which at times made the world such a difficult place to understand and accept would be resolved as a result.

67. **Mr. Akinsanya** (Nigeria) said that his country's institutional and legislative machinery was being improved to ensure effective implementation of the Convention throughout the country. The Convention had also been simplified and translated into three Nigerian languages, and the Ministry of Education had been advised to incorporate its provisions into the school curriculum. Moreover, non-governmental organizations had been encouraged to integrate children's concerns into their activities and were involved in setting up child-rights clubs in schools.

68. In response to the concern expressed by the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography that Nigeria had become a transit country for the trafficking of children to Gabon (A/54/411, para. 34), his delegation wished to assure the Committee that the Nigerian Government had already taken a number of legislative and other measures to curb that "socio-economic malaise". Juvenile-justice administrators had been sensitized, and the Nigerian Immigration Service was on continuous alert. The Government was committed to fighting that vice by improving the economic well-being of its people; international assistance would be much appreciated. Nigeria also welcomed the adoption of the new ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention.

69. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict should be commended on his efforts to ensure that child rights became a major concern on the Security Council's agenda. Tribute was also due to UNICEF for its leadership role in promoting the rights of the child in Africa and elsewhere; its focus on country capacity-building was particularly welcome.

70. In conclusion, Nigeria wished to associate itself with those delegations which had called for a ban on anti-personnel landmines. Children should have a right to play freely without fear of being maimed for life; their families should also have the right to freely cultivate their farms in order to feed their children. It was to be hoped that the international community, inspired by the vision of a better future for children, would seek to create a "child-friendly" world in the new millennium.

71. **Ms. Romulus** (Haiti) said that 10 years after the World Summit for Children, the rights of the child continued to be violated, with children affected by armed conflict, exposed to the worst forms of child labour or forced to live on the streets. It was to be hoped that yet another World Summit would not be required before the adult decision-makers of the world redoubled their efforts for children, with a view to creating a new world order based on respect for human rights. Individuals must also be made aware of the role they

could play in saving the world and its children — who, after all, would be the leaders of tomorrow. The aims of the World Summit were fully relevant today.

72. Despite an economic, political and social crisis which hampered implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, her Government had succeeded in increasing access to education. With the support of the private sector, it had also improved facilities for abandoned children. The economic crisis had, however, only exacerbated the situation of child domestic workers in Haiti who, according to UNICEF, numbered some 300,000. It had always been traditional for wealthy families to take on girl helpers from the countryside, giving them the benefits of urban life in a middle-class family. The arrangement, indeed, used to benefit both families. Nowadays, however, host families had barely enough to meet their own needs, let alone those of the child worker, who tended to be overworked and accorded little attention. The Government, for its part, had introduced legislation in order to combat child labour. Primary education, for example, was compulsory for all. Other measures included the introduction of school canteens throughout the country and the distribution of school uniforms to primary-school pupils. A number of schools had also been built or renovated.

73. **Ms. Lorling** (Singapore) stressed the importance of positive family values in supporting young people through childhood and adolescence, academic pressures and career problems. However, families required the support of the Government and community. Quality education was also essential and must be viewed as a long-term investment. Singapore's childcare programme aimed to ensure that quality centres were widely available. Working mothers and families on low incomes were also eligible for additional support. In the field of family violence and child abuse, group-therapy programmes were available for both perpetrators and victims. Training was also provided to staff involved in handling such cases. Singapore also possessed rehabilitation programmes for juvenile delinquents.

74. Violations of the rights of the child must, indeed, be tackled at the source. Her Government was committed to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and sought above all to implement preventive programmes to strengthen families and ensure the welfare of children.

75. **Mr. Bhatti** (Pakistan), welcoming the efforts of UNICEF to raise awareness of the situation of children, expressed his delegation's hope for an early adoption of both draft optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention also represented a significant development; however, it should not be used as an excuse for protectionist measures against affected countries. Since child labour did not exist in a vacuum, it was essential, at both the national and international levels, to address underlying socio-economic factors such as poverty.

76. Pakistan remained committed to implementing follow-up to the World Summit for Children and had established legal and institutional machinery to that end. The goal was to achieve universal primary education enrolment by the year 2003. The Government had also sought to prevent child labour through law enforcement and regular inspections. There had been some 6,000 prosecutions to date, with nearly 1,400 convictions. Moreover, the agreement signed between ILO, UNICEF and the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry to eliminate child labour in the soccer-ball-stitching industry represented an international success story.

77. **Ms. de Armas García** (Cuba) warned that, if countries did not assume their responsibilities for the present generation, their children would see only the "remnants" of modern civilization which, despite the efforts of the international community, was failing in the face of disease, malnutrition, infant mortality, armed conflicts, wars and indiscriminate bombings. In those conflicts, children were either armed or were threatened by sophisticated weaponry. Children were being sold or trafficked in, for prostitution or other purposes; there was physical and sexual abuse, child pornography and sex tourism; children's body organs were being sold; their labour was being exploited; and they had no future as they roamed the streets in which they lived in an environment of drugs and delinquency.

78. The promises and targets of the World Summit for Children had been eloquent and ambitious, but children could not survive or thrive on promises; political will was required if promises were to become realities; if the 130 million children in developing countries who were not in school and the 250 million children who worked, many of them trapped in dangerous situations in which their work was exploited, were to be helped; and if sanitation was to be provided for the 2,900 million people, half of them children, who risked disease and death without it. It was inconceivable that 32,000 children a day died from preventable diseases and from malnutrition.

79. The United Nations system had helped achieve some goals for children, with UNICEF leadership. In that connection, the Government and people of Cuba felt great grief at the death of Mr. Luis Zúñiga, UNICEF representative in Cuba, who had done so much for children there.

80. Pursuant to the commitments made at the World Summit for Children, Cuba had established a national programme of action for comprehensive child development and had mobilized all possible resources towards that end. In a large part of the world, however, the limitations were basically structural and required action beyond the scope of any one Government: it made no sense to aim for comprehensive development for children unless it took account of their social and material environment. Thus, in addition to national efforts there must be a new philosophy of international solidarity which would generate fresh resources to help developing countries implement their national plans for follow-up to the Summit.

81. She noted that, whereas in some countries Governments were focusing in the education area on ensuring that their students mastered computer technology, in most countries Governments could not even provide the notebooks and pencils needed for their primary schools.

82. She noted also that the Convention on the Rights of the Child had 191 States parties, more than any other United Nations convention. She called on the few States that had not yet ratified the Convention to do so for the tenth anniversary of its adoption. However, ratification alone was not enough: more decisive, far-reaching action was needed at both national and international levels.

83. She commended the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict on his work, but found that his report (A/54/430) contained lacunae: it should have referred explicitly to the devastating effects on children of unilateral coercive measures. The Security Council, which was responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, was not the appropriate body to deal with children's rights. Nor should Council decisions prejudice extensive and thorough consideration of children's rights by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, the competent bodies under the Charter in social and humanitarian matters and human rights.

84. The Cuban Government had hoped for an exhaustive report on the pernicious practices of the sale of children, child prostitution and the use of children in pornography, but had been disappointed. She expressed the hope that the debate at the next session of the Commission on Human Rights would be based on a clearer identification of where the problems lay and how they could be tackled. Given that those problems persisted, the work of the Commission on Human Rights to develop two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child was necessary, and Cuba would participate actively in it.

85. Cuba was proud that it spared no effort to care for children's lives, from the very moment of conception. Indeed, the commitments Cuba had made at the World Summit for Children were real targets for both Government and people. Cuba had the world's highest teacher/child ratio in its schools, and every Cuban child or young person had both a classroom to go to and a teacher to teach in it. Over the past 40 years, excellent doctors and paramedics had been trained and were caring for people's health both at home and abroad. Despite the difficulties under which it was forced to operate, infant mortality was down to 7.1 per thousand, and diphtheria, poliomyelitis, and other curable diseases had been eliminated. Also, all children had basic education.

86. Cuba's commitment to ensuring that not a single child died a preventable death and the huge effort of the Cuban health system to achieve that goal were widely recognized. However, some of Cuba's child-health indicators could be qualitatively better: Cuba had had to pay $30 million over and above market prices to procure the medicines and equipment needed for specialized treatment of children. Many of those medicines were produced by companies in the United States of America or using technologies from that country: Cuban children had no access to cutting-edge medical technologies created in the United States over the past 15 years. Indeed, the children of several generations of Cubans now had the right to ask the Third Committee to put at the top of its agenda the question of the United States Government's systematic violation of the right of Cuban children to comprehensive development through its economic, trade and financial blockade on Cuba.

87. **Mr. Hachani** (Tunisia) said that the reports before the Committee revealed that, despite concerted international action to improve the situation of children, it remained precarious in many parts of the world, notably Africa. International support for country capacity-building remained vital if children were to be protected from the worst forms of child labour; inter-agency efforts to that end had proved particularly welcome.

88. Tunisia, for its part, had sought to bring its policies and legislation into line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and had established appropriate institutional machinery. As part of national efforts to create an enabling environment, a national day had been set aside for children, leisure facilities had been provided, and efforts made to incorporate the rights of the child into school curricula. His delegation was pleased to report a drop in child mortality, an increase in vaccination rates and the attainment of near-universal access to primary education. The Government had also reached out to Tunisian children in other countries by organizing trips to Tunisia and sending teachers abroad.

89. **Ms. Gligorova** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) expressed her delegation's appreciation for United Nations activities in support of children. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the transition towards a market economy and the worsened economic situation had impaired the social and political rights of all citizens, including children. The Government had made children a priority, but relied on continued international assistance. Cooperation with UNICEF on child health, education and social protection had proved particularly successful.

90. The importance, also, of cooperation with civil society and the international community had been brought to the fore during the recent Kosovo crisis. Her Government — under very difficult circumstances — had provided shelter to more than 30,000 refugees, mostly women, children and the elderly, thanks to the help of UNHCR and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict must be commended for visiting the Republic of Macedonia in the midst of the crisis. His assessment of the impact on children of the situation had contributed to a more prompt and appropriate international response. Her delegation also strongly supported the ongoing work on the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts.

91. The work of the Committee served to focus international attention on the future of the world's children. It was vital to address the root cause of violations of the rights of the child, namely poverty, and to ensure universal access to primary education and elimination of sexual and labour abuse. Only then might the conditions be created to enable children to have a happy childhood and to fully realize their potential.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.

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Chairman: Mr. Galuška ..... (Czech Republic)

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Organization of work

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99-82043 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 112: Promotion and protection of the rights of children *(continued)* (A/54/98, 265, 411, 419 and 430)

1. **Mrs. Brobbey** (Ghana) said that children should be protected from war, hunger, ignorance and exploitation. In practice, the international community had failed to live up to its commitments under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As indicated by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in his report, strong political will was now needed to launch an "era of application for international norms" (A/54/430, para. 29). Only then might the survival and proper development of children and of future generations be ensured.

2. The Special Representative's recommendations deserved strong support, in particular his appeal to the international business community to refrain from doing business that fuelled war machines (A/54/430, para. 170). The efforts of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to reduce the impact of armed conflicts on children were also welcome. Her delegation also looked forward to a timely finalization of the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and welcomed Security Council resolution 1261 (1999) on children and armed conflict.

3. Cooperation between law-enforcement agencies must be enhanced to combat the trafficking in and sexual exploitation of children by national and transnational criminal networks. She welcomed the work on a draft optional protocol on trafficking in persons, in the context of the elaboration of a convention on transnational organized crime, and on a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. She also urged Governments to collaborate with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on its international Internet education and safety programme "Innocence in Danger" (A/54/411, para. 7).

4. In regard to juvenile justice, Ghana agreed on the importance of avoiding the revictimization of the child complainant in the judicial process (*ibid.*, para. 10) and of incorporating remedial and preventive strategies into the system. Her Government had, for its part, sought to bring its laws on child rights, justice and welfare into line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, *inter alia*, by raising the age of criminal responsibility from 7 to 14 years, and prohibiting customary practices involving servitude.

5. As to efforts to combat the worst forms of child labour, Ghana welcomed the adoption by the International Labour Organization (ILO) of Convention No. 182; funding provided to UNICEF by Norway and Finland to sensitize the public to the provisions of the new instrument was much appreciated. The Convention on the Rights of the Child must also be further publicized.

6. **Mrs. Aponte de Zacklin** (Venezuela) said that the defence of the rights of the child had always been a matter of priority for Venezuela, and that a sustained effort had been made to bring legislation into conformity with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In 1998, the law on the protection of children and adolescents had been enacted as part of a set of initiatives designed to guarantee children's right to identity and to improve their social, educational and legal status.

7. A new constitution was being drafted which would accord constitutional status to human rights. Following a dialogue between governmental institutions and civil society on the best means of promoting and respecting human rights, significant conclusions had been drawn regarding the rights of the child. Committees of children and adolescents had been set up in educational centres with a view to awakening their interest and ascertaining their views in the drafting of the constitution, in conformity with article 12 of the Convention.

8. The National Children's Institute, functioning under the Ministry of Labour and the Family, which was responsible for the protection of children in Venezuela, had established a network of community organizations, private companies and local governments to provide services for children and adolescents at high social risk and to strengthen the role of the family.

9. Venezuela was aware that a commitment to children was paramount, and reiterated its support for the work of the United Nations in resolving the problems that afflicted them.

10. **Mr. Husain** (Observer for the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)) expressed the hope that the designation of the first decade of the next millennium as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World would be more than symbolic. The question must be asked to what extent the objectives of the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been achieved. As the new millennium commenced, plans at the national, regional and global levels must be carefully reconsidered.

11. OIC and its various affiliated bodies were mindful of the difficulties affecting the majority of the world's children. While recognizing that the solution lay mainly in speedy economic and social development, the relevant OIC forums were focusing on the specific interests of children. Thus, the Twenty-Fourth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, held at Jakarta in December 1996, had called on its member States to pay special attention to the needs of children and women, in particular by establishing periods of truce and corridors of peace and allowing for the passage of relief supplies during armed conflicts; by promoting health services and administering immunizations; and by banning the manufacture, stockpiling, import, export and use of landmines, whose main victims were women and children.

12. The OIC system was consulting and collaborating with the relevant United Nations bodies, including UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNESCO, with a view to harmonizing technical-cooperation programmes undertaken in member States to promote the well-being and healthy development of children. In view of resource constraints, it sought to avoid duplication and to promote optimum complementarity. Recent consultations with UNICEF and UNFPA, although in the early stages, were reason for optimism. He assured the Committee of the complete cooperation of OIC in the realization of those important goals.

13. **Mr. Rahola** (Observer for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) emphasized that the right of children to a dignified life started in the family. To safeguard the rights of children, Governments had a duty to create economically just and environmentally sound societies and to provide for the physical and mental security of their peoples and the well-being of families. The success of international efforts depended on the commitment of decision-makers to peace.

14. The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies believed in action. Its 176 national societies provided assistance to growing numbers of victims of natural disasters and other vulnerable individuals; its efforts at the local level were not always reported by the media. Children accounted for a large proportion of those in need and their welfare should be prioritized and made an integral part of humanitarian-assistance and preparedness strategies. Moreover, the psycho-social rehabilitation of victims of disasters or conflicts should be furthered, especially for children, and the reuniting of families must be a priority. The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement would also be seeking to improve the health and social status of the world's street children, who currently numbered millions. Furthermore, the impact of economic sanctions on women and children should be monitored and the international community should take corresponding action.

15. **Mr. Alaei** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the importance of childhood to the development of individuals made it all the more crucial to pay careful attention to children's concerns. His delegation looked forward to an early conclusion of the draft optional protocols concerning children and urged support for an increase in membership of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

16. As part of its efforts to implement the Convention, the Islamic Republic of Iran had adopted development goals for children. Recently launched programmes accorded special protection to poor children and orphans. Efforts were also being made to fill legislative gaps regarding the status of children. The Islamic Republic of Iran continued to host a record number of refugees and provide free education and health services to some 100,000 Afghan and 25,000 Iraqi refugee children.

17. It was most alarming that the sale of children had become more profitable even than drug trafficking and that it was now ranked second only to the arms business. The inadequacy of certain domestic legal regimes and response mechanisms was a matter of serious concern. Prevention of child abuse, child pornography and child sex tourism should, indeed, be made a priority on the millennium agenda. The use of children in illegal activities such as drug trafficking was also a matter of international concern. The family, school authorities and drug-control organizations had a special responsibility to keep children and young people away from drug-related crime.

18. In over 50 countries, children in conflict situations were deliberately massacred, caught in the crossfire, orphaned or rendered homeless. The Islamic Republic of Iran therefore attached great importance to country visits by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. Monitoring mechanisms might also be introduced in serious cases of war-torn countries. The international community must take action to stop children being targeted with impunity, particularly in Afghanistan, where the abhorrent treatment of women and children at the hands of the Taliban was of particular concern.

19. Although poverty and lack of education provided fertile ground for the exploitation of children, the main challenge facing the international community was the decline in some societies of moral and spiritual values, the disintegration of the family and the dissemination of sex and violence by the media and Internet.

20. **Mr. Belinga-Eboutou** (Cameroon) said that children in Africa were traditionally cherished. It was only recently, as a result of globalization, negative economic trends and armed conflicts, that children's issues had become problematic and that their very right to life was in jeopardy. Cameroon supported all United Nations efforts in behalf of children, including General Assembly resolution 53/128 on the rights of the child. The draft optional protocols on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and on the involvement of children in armed conflict were also welcome. The work of UNICEF to improve the status of African children was particularly appreciated.

21. Cameroon, for its part, was relentless in its commitment to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The continuing high mortality rate of children was of deep concern, as was the impact on children of emerging problems such as HIV/AIDS, drug addiction, delinquency and homelessness. The international community must step up its actions against poverty, which was the root cause of violations of the rights of the child.

22. **Mr. Otunnu** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict), commenting on themes raised during the debate, said that his mandate involved protecting children at every stage of an armed conflict: beforehand, in the midst of conflict and in its aftermath. It was vital to respond to the many manifestations of a child's suffering in situations of armed conflict. The international community must respond to similar situations of suffering everywhere.

23. His own role was that of an advocate, catalyst, convenor, cheerleader and facilitator. On the ground, he relied on operational partners to implement the common agenda, to provide his Office with information and to monitor country follow-up to commitments.

24. As part of his mandate, he had sought to further collaboration at a number of levels within the United Nations system and Secretariat, including through bilateral consultations with key partners. He had also made it a priority to develop strong collaboration with regional organizations, non-governmental organizations and communities of faith. The issues and programme for each country visit were shaped in close consultation with the United Nations country team under the overall coordination of the resident coordinator or a special representative. His Office also worked closely with the Committee on the Rights of the Child and collaborated with a number of partners on the issues of small arms and of internally displaced persons. Delegations had an important role to play in translating the rhetoric of collaboration into action.

25. It was to be hoped that his mandate had increased awareness of the situation of children in armed conflict and that such awareness would lead to international outrage and action. It was a question not only of launching, but of realizing an era of application of international norms. He had also sought to raise awareness of the importance of traditional norms providing for the protection of children. It was essential that the protection and welfare of children should be systematically discussed in peace negotiations and incorporated into peace accords, so that children might be a central concern in post-conflict situations. He had also developed initiatives to respond to cross-border issues affecting children and to build local capacities for protection of children and advocacy. While the prerogatives of the various deliberative bodies of the United Nations must be respected, the widespread brutalization of children in armed conflicts should be of central concern to the Security Council, in particular the abominations committed against children as a direct consequence of a breakdown of peace and security. He hoped that the legacy of his efforts would extend well beyond the lifespan of his mandate.

Agenda item 113: Programme of activities of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (A/54/487)

26. **Mr. Ndiaye** (Director, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights), introducing the item, summarized the report of the Secretary-General on the programme of activities of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (A/54/487) and drew attention to the related conference room paper, which would later be issued as A/54/487/Add.1.

27. **Mr. Khanal** (Nepal) said that at the mid-point of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, its objectives remained elusive. As a multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural country, Nepal had always supported the efforts of the United Nations system to improve the overall situation of indigenous people, and was aware of the problems and challenge they faced. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal emphasized the promotion of the interests of economically and socially backward groups and communities, and made special provision for their education, health and employment. In its current five-year plan, the Government aimed to eradicate social inequality, poverty and unemployment among the indigenous people. Its long-term policy, on the other hand, involved the creation of an environment that would foster the active engagement of indigenous people and ethnic groups in development.

28. Nationalities made up one third of the total population of Nepal: clearly, national development would not be possible without the knowledge, skills and capacities of such a large segment of the population. The Government had formed a national committee for the development of nationalities, which aimed to empower indigenous people through decentralization, local development and human-resource use and development. It had also encouraged non-governmental organizations and civil society in general to carry out programmes for indigenous people.

29. **Ms. Melba Pria** (Mexico) said that Mexico's cultural diversity was one of its greatest riches and was enshrined in the Constitution. The territory of Mexico held the greatest and most diverse concentration of indigenous peoples in the American continent; they numbered 10 million and spoke over 60 different languages. Each ethnic group had its own organizational structures; some formed tribes and others communities: currently there were no structures that embraced all the speakers of any one language. In addition, each area had its own principle of landownership, collective or individual, which was protected by the Constitution. The regions occupied by indigenous peoples were mostly rural and sparsely settled, requiring great efforts to provide them with services.

30. Such vast diversity ruled out a single approach, and designing public policies constituted a challenge. The Government recognized the historical legacy of inequality, and knew that finding a solution depended on a profound understanding of indigenous life. However, it was confronting the material challenges with firmness and imagination.

31. Various measures had been taken in recent years. A survey of employment in indigenous areas included indicators on occupation, underemployment and employment. The 2000 census, incorporating the concept of self-designation of ethnicity, would provide new knowledge about the sociodemographic characteristics of Mexico's indigenous population. In addition, a national programme for priority regions provided for the coordination of development with the participation of all levels of government and civil society.

32. In addition, a programme for education, health and food, launched in 1997, was designed to assess the causes of poverty and to provide families with tools and skills to develop their capacities. It had helped nearly two million people, most of them in indigenous areas. More than 1.5 million indigenous children had access to basic bilingual and bicultural instruction, and one million textbooks had been published in 40 indigenous languages. Furthermore, there were 24 indigenous radio stations that broadcast programmes in 32 indigenous languages and in Spanish, with an audience of 5 million. Grants were made directly to indigenous community organizations for the implementation of projects in the areas of human rights, the administration of justice, the preservation and dissemination of the country's cultural legacy, and the generation of employment. National efforts to promote the recognition of cultural differences included measures to encourage indigenous people to consult the Government.

33. In keeping with the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (No. 169), the national legal framework had been reformed in behalf of indigenous peoples, and the Congress was currently examining various constitutional reforms on indigenous rights and culture. Federal laws regarding education, land-holding, the administration of justice, the environment, forestry and authors' rights had been reformed. At the state level, half the country's constituent states had amended their laws to include indigenous participation in political affairs and the administration of justice.

34. A national human-rights programme had been instituted in 1998, with emphasis on the human rights of indigenous peoples. A special public prosecutor's office and a consultation centre for indigenous affairs had also been established. The Government provided various kinds of assistance in judicial proceedings involving indigenous persons.

35. At the international level, Mexico supported the causes of indigenous peoples, including the elaboration of the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people and the establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous people, which would promote respect and understanding between indigenous and non-indigenous populations. In the view of Mexico, the United Nations must accommodate indigenous realities in its programmes. The denunciation of injustices was not an end in itself; rather, it must become a means of seeking solutions. Respect for indigenous peoples' right to pluralism and self development was one of the international community's greatest challenges. The creation of a new relationship between Government, society and indigenous peoples must be based on respect for their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and on peaceful dialogue.

36. **Mr. Petrella** (Argentina) stressed the importance which his delegation attached to indigenous issues. His Government was working to ensure full respect of indigenous rights in the areas of landownership, housing, environment and community property and had made it easier

for indigenous communities to acquire legal status, which would facilitate land ownership. In the area of education, inter-cultural bilingualism was a priority, and since 1993 special programmes had been undertaken to promote respect for indigenous culture, improve access to education and provide scholarships to indigenous students. The rich contribution of indigenous languages to the Spanish spoken in Argentina was widely recognized.

37. A representative of the Mapuche people, co-sponsored by his delegation, had participated in the International Day of Indigenous People held in August 1999 at Headquarters, at which his delegation had made a statement on the debt owed by Argentine society to its indigenous communities. He noted that the constitutional reform of 1994 clearly provided for the respect of the rights of indigenous populations.

38. His delegation would continue to work to strengthen international cooperation to solve the problems of indigenous populations and to support the work of the United Nations system in that context. He would follow with great interest the discussions in the working group on a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people and supported the early establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous people with the United Nations system.

39. **Ms. Furubjelke** (Sweden), speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden), said that much remained to be done in order to fulfil the goals of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. Partnership, the theme of the Decade, was essential to solving the problems facing indigenous peoples worldwide. There was a need to promote good relationships between States and indigenous peoples, based on mutual respect and understanding as well as respect for human rights, and to encourage cooperation among indigenous peoples themselves. The Nordic countries were committed to working at the international and national levels to fulfil the aim of the Decade; she welcomed the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/54/487) on the activities of the United Nations system during the first half of the Decade and expressed the hope that the progress would continue.

40. The establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous peoples in the United Nations system would be an important tool for coordination and exchange of information between indigenous peoples themselves as well as between indigenous peoples and States and would strengthen cooperation and avoid duplication in the United Nations system. She therefore welcomed the re-establishment of the ad hoc working group and hoped it would submit concrete proposals on the establishment of a permanent forum by the next session of the Commission on Human Rights. She urged all indigenous peoples and States to participate in the exchange of ideas with a view to elaborating realistic proposals, bearing in mind the idea of partnership.

41. Some progress had been made in drafting a declaration on the rights of indigenous people but many difficult issues remained. She hoped that in forthcoming meetings of the working group both indigenous peoples and Governments would show flexibility and true partnership in agreeing on the substantive provisions of the draft declaration. She reaffirmed the Nordic countries' commitment to work actively with a view to preparing a declaration which contributed to the promotion of the rights of indigenous peoples around the world.

42. The Nordic countries strongly supported the mainstreaming of indigenous issues throughout the United Nations system. They would continue working to alleviate the problems facing the indigenous peoples of the world and she urged agencies that had not yet taken any practical steps in that regard to do so. The Nordic countries would continue to contribute to the Voluntary Fund for the International Decade and to the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations and urged other States to do likewise.

43. The creation of an enabling environment for the respect and preservation of the Sami and Inuit cultures was a common goal for the Nordic countries. Those indigenous peoples had established cross-border cooperation which provided a foundation for the development of their cultures and raised public awareness. Their rights were better protected than ever before. For example, the Sami Parliaments of Finland, Norway and Sweden had agreed in 1997 to institutionalize their cooperation within a new Sami Parliamentarian Council. She also noted that Greenland had enjoyed home rule since 1997 and in addition had two seats in the Danish Parliament.

44. She stressed that the Decade must be a point of departure for the international community in protecting the rights of indigenous peoples and in improving their situation worldwide.

45. **Mr. Luck** (Australia) reaffirmed his delegation's support for United Nations efforts to protect the rights of indigenous peoples, in particular the efforts by specialized agencies to provide practical assistance and improve the coordination and delivery of programmes.

46. One of his Government's key priorities was to put an end to the social and economic disadvantage faced by its indigenous people and, to that end, in August 1999

Parliament had passed an historic motion of reconciliation expressing deep regret at the injustices and trauma inflicted on the indigenous people and reaffirming a commitment to reconciliation as an important national priority. That motion had been well-received by many indigenous leaders.

47. Practical initiatives had also been undertaken. Since the early 1970s the Government had purchased privately owned land for the benefit of indigenous communities and government lands had been transferred to indigenous control. As a result, 15 per cent of the Australian continent was owned or controlled by indigenous people, who represented only 2 per cent of the population. In addition, since 1992, court decisions and complementary legislation had recognized the continuing rights of indigenous people to possess and enjoy their traditional lands.

48. Despite progress in land ownership, however, indigenous people remained the most disadvantaged group within the Australian community in the areas of health, life expectancy, housing, schooling and living conditions. The Government had therefore allocated a record 2.2 billion Australian dollars to indigenous issues in the current financial year, in addition to programmes available to indigenous Australians as members of the general public and to other indigenous-specific funding provided at all government levels. Spending would be concentrated on the key areas of health, housing, education and employment, in accordance with the underlying objective of effecting a shift away from welfare dependency towards economic development and self-reliance.

49. Well-targeted, practical measures had succeeded in improving the situation of indigenous people in areas such as infant mortality, schooling, professional employment and housing, and indigenous communities were involved in the development and implementation of government policies which affected them. For example, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, the Government's primary adviser on indigenous issues, which controlled half of the Government's annual expenditure in indigenous affairs, was a government department controlled not by a minister but by a popularly elected indigenous board. Hundreds of other indigenous organizations also played a role in the development and implementation of indigenous programmes, and many indigenous communities had local-government powers on land which they owned and controlled.

50. He stressed that reconciliation required an ongoing commitment by indigenous and non-indigenous Australians to work together to bring about a better future for Australia's first people and thereby enrich the nation as a whole. There was unambiguous evidence that the nation was moving towards that goal.

51. **Ms. Boyko** (Ukraine) said that the protection and promotion of the rights of indigenous people and national minorities contributed to the stability of multiethnic societies and to their dynamic and peaceful development. That issue was also directly related to national and regional security and good relations between States.

52. The achievement of the ambitious but realistic goals of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People would not only solve specific problems faced by indigenous peoples but would also make a substantial contribution to the peaceful coexistence of nations, national minorities and ethnic groups. Success would depend on effective planning, coordination and cooperation between all interested parties. The High Commissioner for Human Rights, as coordinator for the Decade, would have an important role to play.

53. With regard to the main objectives of the Decade, she noted that the working group on the elaboration of a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people had made some progress but there was still no consensus on a number of principles.

54. Her delegation had always stressed the need to classify ethnic groups in order to facilitate national policies on the rights of national minorities and indigenous people, and believed that the draft declaration should make a distinction between two categories of indigenous groups, those leading a tribal way of life on isolated reservations and those integrated with the rest of society. The declaration should also strictly prohibit any actions that impaired the territorial integrity or political unity and stability of sovereign States.

55. She urged the working group to avoid politicization, and strongly supported the proposal made by the High Commissioner for Human Rights that regional consultations should be held between Governments and indigenous peoples, with the assistance of her Office, to discuss the draft declaration, as part of common efforts to develop a universal and effective document on the rights of indigenous people.

56. Her delegation also supported the establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous people within the United Nations. The ad hoc working group must take into account existing experience and the comments made by Governments, specialized agencies, organizations of indigenous peoples and the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, because only a cooperative approach would permit the establishment of an effective and competent body.

57. She regretted that, although there were several definitions and descriptions of indigenous peoples in various international documents, none of them captured the diversity of indigenous peoples worldwide. Many States therefore tended to look for solutions within the context of their national, constitutional and historical framework and the experience of other countries.

58. Since becoming an independent State, Ukraine had been consistent in safeguarding the rights of indigenous peoples, national groups and citizens, including those that had been harmed by events in the past. Many former deportees and their descendants were returning to their historical birthplaces, and her Government was endeavouring to ensure their smooth and peaceful return and integration into society without infringing upon the rights of existing residents. It hoped that the newly created Consultative Council of Crimean Tatars would contribute to the elimination of obstacles and to a constructive dialogue between the Government and Crimean Tatars for a complete solution to the problems of resettlement of repatriates in the Crimea. She also expressed her gratitude for the cooperation and assistance in that area provided by various international organizations.

59. **Ms. Di Felice** (Venezuela) stressed the importance of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People as a framework for protecting their rights and increasing awareness not only of their problems but also of their contributions to society. She expressed satisfaction at the progress made by the working group charged with drafting a declaration on the rights of indigenous people. Given the international community's commitment to the objectives of the Decade, efforts must continue in order to reach agreement on how best to guarantee the rights of indigenous peoples, taking into account their diversity as well as historical and legal factors. The working group must therefore show flexibility in its discussions in order to succeed. The establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous people within the United Nations system would be an effective way of increasing the participation of indigenous groups in the activities of the Organization.

60. She took note of the report of the Secretary-General on the programme of activities of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (A/54/487) and stressed the important coordinating role played by the Indigenous Project Team in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. She also expressed satisfaction at the efforts made by the specialized agencies, financial institutions and operational programmes to improve the living conditions of indigenous peoples, particularly in the developing countries.

61. Noting that national action was essential to ensure the success of the Decade, she said that indigenous issues had long been neglected by policy makers but were now recognized as essential in order to modernize a country, strengthen the rule of law and promote social integration. In Venezuela, there were indigenous representatives in the National Assembly and a new chapter on the rights of indigenous peoples had been added to the Constitution. As part of the creation of a multi-ethnic and pluricultural society in Venezuela, indigenous peoples' social, economic and political organization, culture, traditions, languages, religions, property rights and right to health would be recognized. Indigenous peoples would be guaranteed the right to continue traditional economic activities and to participate in the national economy. The State would guarantee indigenous workers the full benefit of labour laws and would eliminate all discrimination in access to employment and working conditions. Education would be intercultural and bilingual, taking into account sociocultural differences and values. The State would support indigenous cultural activities. Indigenous peoples would also have full political rights, including participation in the National Assembly and in other federal bodies involving them. In return, the indigenous peoples would have a duty to contribute actively to preserving the integrity and sovereignty of the nation.

62. She reiterated her delegation's commitment to the cause of indigenous peoples and stressed that the goal of the Decade must be to strengthen international cooperation in order to resolve the problems of indigenous peoples, and that non-governmental organizations and organizations of indigenous peoples themselves must play a leading role in those efforts.

63. **Ms. Paterson** (New Zealand) said that her country had been encouraged by the progress made in integrating awareness of indigenous issues in United Nations programmes and activities. More needed to be done, however, to ensure ongoing coordination among the agencies, which should intensify their efforts in consultation with indigenous people, including the designation of focal points for coordinating activities related to the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. New Zealand was actively engaged in the work of elaborating a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people and of establishing a permanent forum for indigenous people in the United Nations system. While progress towards an agreed draft declaration had been limited, the increased level of participation by States was encouraging. All participants

should intensify their efforts in good faith in order to reach agreement on a declaration by the end of the Decade.

64. In 1996, New Zealand had established a fund to advance the objectives of the Decade, including the promotion of the Maori language and education. A committee of principal Maori organizations had been established to coordinate that effort in consultation with the Ministry of Maori Development. The translation into Maori and distribution of major international human-rights instruments had been an important undertaking. The Government had also recently held a workshop with Maori to discuss the progress made with regard to the draft declaration and the proposed permanent forum.

65. The activities of the Decade should deliver practical results for indigenous peoples. The evaluation of programmes at the mid-point of the Decade was vital, and New Zealand welcomed the report by the High Commissioner for Human Rights in her capacity as coordinator for the Decade. Her delegation welcomed the indications that United Nations agencies were expanding their relationships with indigenous groups, and looked forward to receiving further information on activities undertaken by States and to discussing proposals for making progress in the second half of the Decade. States should give the High Commissioner their full support in that important task, and it was hoped that the review would lay a basis for the remainder of the Decade.

66. There was a need for greater coordination among the specialized agencies. The United Nations system had yet to undertake global public-awareness activities in relation to the Decade. To ensure the implementation of the programme of activities during the second half of the Decade, it was crucial that the High Commissioner should receive adequate funding from the regular budget, necessary administrative assistance and the support of States. Accordingly, she urged all States to allocate resources to contribute to the review and to redouble their efforts to achieve the aims of the Decade in its second half. New Zealand had recently submitted to the Office of the High Commissioner its mid-point review of the implementation of the activities of the Decade. For the remainder of the Decade, particular attention would be given to activities related to indigenous cultural heritage, including the Maori language.

67. **Ms. Ribeiro Viotti** (Brazil) said that her country, in which there were 215 ethnic groups, was committed to the promotion of the rights of indigenous people and was determined to preserve their sociocultural identity and ensure the full enjoyment of their rights, particularly the right to possess land. Land and a sound environment were essential for ensuring healthy conditions for the sustainable development of indigenous populations. Accordingly, the 1988 Constitution had granted indigenous groups "original rights" to the land that they traditionally occupied. More than 11 per cent of the national territory was reserved for the permanent use of Brazil's indigenous population. Three quarters of indigenous lands were now demarcated; and law-enforcement agencies continued to evict gold prospectors and squatters from demarcated areas. That effort had been accompanied by educational and health programmes. Her Government intended to expand those programmes to meet the specific needs of the indigenous population.

68. Brazil attached great importance to the implementation of the programme of activities for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People and encouraged the relevant agencies to take tangible steps to achieve the Decade's objectives. Her country was not convinced, however, of the need for the establishment of a new forum for indigenous people since broadening the mandate of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations could be a much more sensible alternative. The draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people must be universally acceptable and politically realistic. The distinct historical and legal backgrounds that had determined the relationship between indigenous communities and national societies could not be an excuse for not ensuring the universality of human rights. Creative solutions would have to be worked out on a number of key issues, including the need to ensure respect for indigenous traditions without resorting to concepts that might be construed as ways to impair the territorial integrity of States.

69. **Mr. Nikiforov** (Russian Federation) said that the objectives of the Decade were central to his Government's efforts to protect the rights and interests of its small indigenous groups. The development of federal and regional legislation in that regard was one of the major problems being tackled by the Russian Federation during the Decade. Legislative acts adopted in recent years would make it possible to define the legal field for developing traditional types of economic activity as a basis for ensuring the viability of small indigenous peoples, developing local self-government and establishing relations based on partnership with governmental bodies at various levels.

70. The adoption in April 1999 of a federal law on guaranteeing the rights of small indigenous peoples was of major importance. The law guaranteed the socio-economic and cultural development of those peoples and protected their traditional areas of habitation, way of life and industries. The State Duma was currently considering draft laws on the lands traditionally used by the small indigenous

peoples of the Russian Federation in the North, Siberia and the Far East, and on the general principles for organizing small indigenous communities.

71. Their adoption and implementation would make it possible to initiate a policy based on partnership between the State and indigenous peoples, one of the strategic objectives of the Decade. The partnership strategy would facilitate preservation of their cultural identity, their participation in political affairs, and environmental protection.

72. In September 1999, a meeting of representatives of small indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East had taken place in Moscow within the framework of the International Decade. The meeting's final document stressed the importance of the active involvement of indigenous peoples in the building of the country and in ensuring the stable development in the North of traditional and modern means of production, with protection of the inhabited environment. Lastly, he stressed the need to step up work on the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people and efforts to establish a permanent forum for indigenous people in the United Nations system. Those tasks must be carried out within the framework of the Decade.

73. **Mr. Sfeir-Younis** (World Bank) said that his organization cared deeply about the concerns and future of indigenous peoples and was ready to assist developing countries in addressing such issues as improving the welfare of indigenous populations, protecting their human and natural environments, developing institutions that responded to their needs, combating acute poverty and social instability, and problems associated with land ownership. The progress made during the International Decade had been less than adequate, and there were still too many tasks pending, including the realization of the rights of indigenous peoples.

74. Indigenous peoples had historically been the poorest and most excluded populations in many parts of the world. Sustainable development would never be achieved if societies did not attain cultural sustainability, which was at the root of economic and social progress. Achieving the goals of the Decade required a tremendous political commitment at the national, regional and local levels.

75. The World Bank had been the first multilateral financial institution to introduce a special policy for the treatment of indigenous and tribal peoples in development projects. Any policy on indigenous peoples should be closely linked to development and poverty reduction. There was a need for a much better definition of those who belonged to the category of indigenous peoples, and that definition must be brought about through comprehensive consultations. Legal measures should be taken to protect the rights of indigenous peoples to land and the cultural, religious and sacred values connected with it. Whenever development projects proposed the exploitation of resources on lands owned, occupied or used by indigenous peoples, the latter should be informed of the potential commercial value of such resources and the potential impact on their livelihood.

76. Poverty eradication was fundamental to implementing economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development. Since resources were limited, compromises would have to be agreed upon to provide health, education and sanitation services. Countries and different groups in society must enhance their ability to implement existing rights. The Bank was making an important contribution in that regard by strengthening justice systems, enhancing participation and social inclusion, and investing in basic social services. The Bank was also fully aware of the multiple roles that land played in the lives of indigenous peoples. Land was not just a factor of production and the means of accumulating wealth. There was a sacred, spiritual and unique relationship between the land and indigenous peoples. The issues of land access, use and management must be addressed within the context of the overall vision that defined the future of indigenous societies.

77. The World Bank's policy relating to indigenous peoples dated back to 1982. In 1991, the Bank had issued a revised policy, expanding the definition of indigenous peoples to include a much wider array of groups that maintained social and cultural identities distinct from those of the societies in which they lived. More than 150 Bank-financed projects worldwide had been identified as affecting indigenous peoples. While, in the past, many of those investments had been in the infrastructure and energy sectors, an increasing number were currently in the fields of education, health, community development, agriculture, natural-resources management and land-tenure security.

78. There was a need for better project design and instruments to reflect the development goals of indigenous peoples. That required a major political commitment at all levels of decision-making, including the support of Governments as well as indigenous peoples. Indigenous cultures and societies must be central to all efforts to promote social inclusion.

79. **Mr. Howell** (International Labour Organization (ILO)) said that ILO had been deeply committed to promoting the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples since the 1920s and actively participated in the Working Group on Indigenous Populations. ILO sought to promote employment and sustainable livelihoods for indigenous and tribal peoples by

adopting and supervising the implementation of formal instruments and through technical cooperation. ILO Convention No. 169 was the most comprehensive instrument of international law for the protection of the right of indigenous and tribal peoples to preserve their own laws and customs within the national societies in which they lived. It established minimum rights which must be respected by the States parties, and had guided a number of Supreme Court decisions in the Americas, illustrating its potential to influence national law.

80. In the context of the International Decade, ILO had undertaken a number of technical cooperation projects and programmes to increase awareness and promote improvements in living and working conditions. In Central America, a three-year project was under way, focusing on the legal empowerment of indigenous peoples through enhanced consultation between indigenous organizations, State institutions and non-governmental organizations at both regional and national levels. Elsewhere in Latin America, ILO projects included the training of indigenous legal promoters on the legislative implications of land use and the training of field staff in practical post-conflict applications of Convention No. 169.

81. With donor assistance, ILO cooperated with Governments, employers and workers' organizations, indigenous and tribal organizations and non-governmental organizations, notably in Asia and southern Africa, to focus attention on politically sensitive issues. ILO also implemented an interregional programme to support the self-reliance of indigenous and tribal communities through cooperatives and other self-help organizations. The programme was being implemented in 10 countries in Asia, Africa and Central America in close collaboration with multilateral, bilateral and private donors.

82. ILO projects supported the strengthening of basic livelihoods, ancestral-domain management, the advancement of the status of indigenous women, resource management, capacity-building, preservation of indigenous culture and the strengthening of local organizations. Since the start of the Decade, those projects had trained many thousands of indigenous and tribal people to help their communities revitalize traditional jobs. By encouraging dialogue and cooperation between Governments and indigenous peoples in policy formation, ILO sought to facilitate harmonious development which also recognized the rich diversity of human experience. He invited Member States to enhance the accomplishments of the Decade by urgently ratifying and implementing ILO Convention No. 169.

83. **Mr. Carranza** (Guatemala) commended those organizations, such as UNDP and ILO, which had begun or had decided to revise their own programmes and policies concerning indigenous peoples in accordance with the specific objectives of the International Decade. His delegation was, however, concerned at the fact that insufficient progress had been made with regard to the adoption of a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people and the establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous people in the United Nations system. Member States must demonstrate the necessary political will to finish that work before the end of the Decade.

84. It was necessary first of all to define certain basic concepts, such as "peoples", "territory" and "self-determination". With regard to a permanent forum, Guatemala supported the establishment of a forum with a broad mandate for promoting, *inter alia*, coordination within the United Nations system on indigenous questions and functioning as a focal point for questions relating to indigenous peoples.

85. His delegation fully supported the work on the draft declaration and on the establishment of a permanent forum since both fitted in perfectly with those objectives of the peace agreements that concerned Guatemala's indigenous peoples. In that connection, he reiterated his delegation's position that the concept of self-determination should be a fundamental pillar of the declaration and was essential for guaranteeing the rights of indigenous peoples. Guatemala interpreted that concept within the framework of the unity of the State and territorial integrity.

86. His Government had assumed a number of commitments concerning Guatemala's indigenous peoples, which had been undertaken in order to solve problems relating to the environment, development, education and health. The peace agreements had served as a framework for implementing various programmes and laws. In accordance with those agreements, his country had ratified ILO Convention No. 169 in 1996 and, with ILO assistance, had trained field personnel with regard to the practical implications of the Convention. Lastly, he stressed that Guatemala's Indigenous Development Fund and a number of equality commissions were facilitating the efforts of its indigenous groups to solve their own development problems in the cultural, educational and health fields.

Agenda item 115: Right of peoples to self-determination (*continued*)

87. **Ms. de Armas García** (Cuba), introducing draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.27 on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination, said that Guatemala and Swaziland had joined the sponsors. The draft resolution once again accorded great importance to the right of all States to the full exercise of national sovereignty and of all peoples to self-determination, in view of the fact that mercenary activities continued to increase and take on new forms.

88. The link between mercenary activities and terrorist acts underscored the importance of strengthening the mandate of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the use of mercenaries. The draft resolution, *inter alia*, urged all States to take the necessary steps and to exercise the utmost vigilance against the menace posed by the activities of mercenaries, welcomed the adoption by some States of national legislation that restricted the recruitment, assembly, financing, training and transit of mercenaries, and urged all States to cooperate fully with the Special Rapporteur in the fulfilment of his mandate.

Organization of work

89. **Mr. Alaei** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the Islamic Republic of Iran wished to withdraw its amendment to draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.8 on the question of the death penalty (contained in document A/C.3/54/L.30), but reserved the right to resubmit it in due course.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.